

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for processing customer leads comprising:
  - configuring a lead processing system including
    - accepting a specification of a plurality of users of the system, and
    - accepting specifications of a plurality of rules that includes a set of global rules and for at least some of the users of the system distinct sets of rules associated with each of said users; and
  - routing leads through the system including hierarchically routing a first lead by
    - accepting ~~a first~~ said lead at the lead processing system, including
    - accepting values for each of a plurality of data fields associated with said lead,
    - automatically applying one or more of the set of global rules to said lead,
    - including applying a routing rule to said lead such that said lead is delegated to a first user ~~is selected to receive said lead~~ using the values of the data fields associated with said lead,
    - automatically applying one of more of a first set of rules which are associated with the ~~selected~~ first user to the first lead, including applying a routing rule to said lead such that said lead is delegated to a second user, said lead including is selected

~~to receive said lead that includes~~ a plurality of data fields, and

notifying the ~~selected~~ second user of said lead, including providing values of one or more of the data fields.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein routing the leads through the system further includes receiving a response from the second user related to the disposition of said lead.

3. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein receiving a response from the second user includes receiving an acceptance of said lead.

4. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein notifying the second user of said lead includes withholding values of one or more data fields associated with said lead from the second user, and wherein routing the leads further includes, after receiving the acceptance of said lead, providing said withheld values.

5. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein receiving a response from the second user includes receiving a rejection of said lead, and wherein routing the leads through the system further includes automatically re-routing said lead to another of the users of the system.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein routing the leads through the system further includes after expiration of a time interval after notifying the second user of said lead during which neither an acceptance nor a rejection of said lead was received

from the second user, automatically re-routing said lead to another of said users.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein routing leads through the system further includes routing each of a plurality of leads through the system resulting in different users being notified of different of the leads.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein accepting the specifications of the rules includes accepting a specification of the set of global rules from an administrator of the system and accepting a specification of a set of rules associated with a first user from said first user who is different than the administrator of the system, whereby configuring the system is decentralized.

9. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein accepting the lead includes accepting an electronic communication initiated by a potential customer, wherein the electronic communication includes at least some of the values of data fields associated with the lead.

10. (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein accepting the electronic communication includes accepting an electronic mail message.

11. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein routing the first lead further includes  
applying a prioritization rule including deriving a priority value for the lead from

values of one or more data fields associated with said lead.

12. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein deriving the priority value includes computing a weighted combination of the values of the one or more data fields.

13. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein deriving the priority value includes matching the values of the one or more data fields with a record in a data value and retrieving the priority value from said record.

14. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein routing the leads further includes augmenting the lead including identifying information related to the lead.

15. (Original) The method of claim 13 wherein identifying information related to the lead includes accessing information about a company related to the lead.

16. (Original) The method of claim 13 wherein identifying information related to the lead includes providing product information related to the lead.

17. (Original) The method of claim 13 wherein identifying information related to the lead includes providing sales material related to the lead.

18. (Currently Amended) Software stored on computer-readable media for causing a computer system to perform functions including:

configuring a lead processing system including

accepting a specification of a plurality of users of the system and

accepting specifications of a plurality of rules that includes a set of global rules and for at least some of the users of the system distinct sets of rules associated with each of said users; and

routing leads through the system including hierarchically routing a first lead by

accepting ~~a first~~ said lead at the lead processing system, including

accepting values for each of a plurality of data fields associated with said lead,

automatically applying one or more of the set of global rules to said lead, including applying a routing rule to said lead such that said lead is delegated to a first user ~~is selected to receive said lead~~ using the values of the data fields associated with said lead,

automatically applying one of more of a first set of rules which are associated with the ~~selected~~ first user to the first lead, including applying a routing rule to said lead such that said lead is delegated to a second user, said lead including ~~is selected to receive said lead that includes~~ a plurality of data fields, and

notifying the ~~selected~~ second user of said lead, including providing values of one or more of the data fields.

19. (Currently Amended) A system for routing leads including:

a storage for a plurality of rules that include a plurality of distinct sets of rules associated with different users of the system;

a storage for records each associated with a different leads being processed by the

system; and

an engine for applying the plurality of rules to one of the leads and for hierarchically routing ~~the leads~~ said lead to a succession of users according to those rules, such that rules in each distinct set of rules are applied only to ~~leads~~ said lead that ~~are~~ routed is delegated to the user ~~associate~~ associated with said set of rules.

20. (Currently Amended) A system for processing customer leads comprising:

a first server including a storage for a first plurality of rules that include distinct sets of rules associated with different users of the system, a storage for a first plurality of leads being processed by the system, an engine for applying the plurality of rules to the leads and for hierarchically routing one of the leads to a succession of users according to said rules, such that rules in each distinct set of rules are applied only to said lead that is routed to the user associated with said set of rules, and a communication interface for communicating with other servers;

a second server, including a storage for a plurality of leads; and

a communication channel coupled to the communication interface at the first server and coupled to the second server for routing leads from the first server to the second server and for passing status information for said leads from the second server to the first server.

21. (Original) The system of claim 20 wherein the second server further includes a storage for a second plurality of rules and an engine for applying the second

plurality of rules to leads received from the first server and for routing said leads to users according to said rules.

22. (Currently Amended) A method for processing customer leads comprising:

configuring a lead processing system, including configuring a first server by accepting a first plurality of rules for routing leads at the first server; and routing leads through the system including hierarchically routing a first lead by accepting ~~a first~~ said lead at the first server, including accepting values for each of a plurality of data fields associated with said lead,

automatically applying one or more of the plurality of rules to said lead, including applying a routing rule to said lead such that said lead is delegated to a second server ~~is selected to receive said lead using the values of the data fields associated with said lead,~~

transmitting values of the data fields associated with said lead to the second server, and

at the second server routing the lead to a user and notifying said user of said lead.

23. (Original) The method of claim 22 wherein transmitting values of the data fields associated with said lead to the second server includes withholding some of the value of data fields associated with said lead from the second server.

24. (Original) The method of claim 22 wherein transmitting values of the data fields associated with said lead to the second server includes formatting said values according to an XML based protocol.

25. (Original) The method of claim 22 wherein configuring the lead processing system further includes configuring the second server by accepting a second plurality of rules for routing leads at the second server, and wherein routing the lead at the second server includes applying said second plurality of rules to select the user to whom the lead is routed.

26. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein the first user is the second user.

27. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein the first user is different from the second user.

28. (New) The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
automatically applying one or more of a second set of rules which are associated with the second user to the first lead, including applying a routing rule to said lead such that said lead is delegated to a third user, and  
notifying the third user of said lead, including providing values of one or more of the data fields.